

*Recently poet and
filmmaker Gulzar
in Kolhapur for the
felicitation of his
friend Anant Dixit,
editor of Sakal
- A report*

GULZAR has a weakness for Kolhapur. The fact that he has visited the city twice in ten years inspite of his busy schedule proves it. Kolhapur for him is the city of cinema greats like Bhalji Pendharkar, Baburao Painter, Dr. V. Shantaram and even Dada Kondke, a place Gulzar finds absolutely fascinating.

Ten years ago he was there as a chief guest at the foundation day celebrations of *Sakal*, a powerful Marathi daily. He had then met prominent artistes like Chandrakant Mandre, "the pride of Kolhapur", Ravindra Méstry, a prominent painter and architect and Azizuddin Khan Saheb, a leading musician, visiting some outstanding institutions and architectural wonders, Lata Mangeshkar's house in Panhala where she flees whenever she feels forlorn and sick of Mumbai. He had seen the city in all its splendour, inhaled its aroma, felt peace in its most pristine form, things that almost tempted him to stay back, a temptation he had to resist because of Mumbai which keeps calling back its loving sons and daughters when she feels and fears they are in a mood to desert her.

Ten years later he recently had his second opportunity

Gulzar and Kolhapur

A poet remembers



Gulzar with Anant Dixit and his wife

to visit Kolhapur and he grabbed it. The occasion - 'the felicitation of his old friend, Anant Dixit, 'the simple down-to-earth common man who carried his enormous knowledge and experience without any effort, to honour

whom was both my pleasure and privilege'.

He landed in Kolhapur and instantly went into a flashback (his favourite technique as a filmmaker) and the first bitter truth that struck him was the absence of

Gulzar with Mrs. Chandrakant Mestry



Chandrakant and Ravindra Mestry. They were dead but their work, Chandrakant's films and his paintings and Mestry's construction of the entrance to Kolhapur city and his statue of *Maharani Tararani* keep them "very much alive", Gulzar says. He also believes that when great men like Chandrakant and Mestry die it is not only a loss to their near and dear ones, to their fans, to their cities, to the country they belong to but to its very collective culture and tradition too.

The flashback also includes the sites, the aroma and the people he had then met and the hours he had spent with them, time which taught him things for a lifetime. He realised how the clouds over Panhala looked as if they had stood steady since his last visit, waiting for him, as it were, only nature had changed, grown older but prettier.

The flashback over, Gulzar visits Chandrakant's home for the first time after his death. His wife lives an austere life in just one room. The rest of the bungalow she has converted into a museum of her husband's photographs from various films and all his paintings. It is an experi-

ence he can never forget. He calls Chandrakant a man who lived many lives in one life as an actor, "a rare boon granted by God to just a few of his chosen ones."

Gulzar then talks about yet another unforgettable scene, the time he spent with three hundred brilliant children, his judgement on them. It was a soul-soothing experience. The questions they asked proved that they were way ahead of the children from the cities. "Language was their only problem, otherwise they were the true leaders of tomorrow. I had to be at my wit's end to answer all their questions. They gave me happiness. They gave me hope. Children always do. Sometimes I wonder what the

world would do without these wonderful, innocent, angelic children of God", Gulzar whose love for children is only growing as he grows older says. The only thing which took him time to follow was the repeated questions from the children about why Aroona Irani had not made it as a leading lady even though she was so talented. He had to finally ask for help and was told that they were interested because they knew Gulzar and Aroona shared the same birthday, August 18.

Gulzar is back, his garden (Gulzar) full of thoughts and experiences about Kolhapur, a city he would like to visit again to see the clouds over Panhala, to see how those children grow, to feel richer as a collector of life's experiences in all their splendour, something that is vanishing from Mumbai, the city which has fulfilled so many of his dreams and desires, a favour it has done to so many who can dare to dream and desire because the large-hearted city of Mumbai is the only place and its people the only people who allow them to.